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ABSTRACT

The authors employ earlier research as a springboard from which to further investigate the relative resistance to counterpropaganda of attitude change resulting from counterattitudinal advocacy and from passive exposure to a persuasive message. Two hundred and twenty-six undergraduate students enrolled in summer session courses in sociology, political science, and education at a small Michigan college were asked to write (Counterattitudinal Advocacy condition) and read (Passive Reception condition) persuasive messages which would ostensibly be used to convince college freshmen to live on campus. Various other activities were also required of the subjects. Considering earlier conclusions and the implications which ensued, the results of this study were disappointing. There were no differences in the amount of resistance to immediate counterpropaganda conferred by counterattitudinal advocacy and passive message reception. Earlier findings of greater immediate attitude change for those engaging in counterattitudinal advocacy were not replicated. Several possible explanations for the negative results are observed in the discussion of the study. (EE)

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Resistance to Persuasion Following Counterattitudinal Advocacy: Some Preliminary Thoughts

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The past two decades have witnessed the development of a burgeoning literature dealing with the persuasive impact of counterattitudinal advocacy (e.g., Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Feldman, 1966, esp. pp. 109-170; Abelson et al., 1968, esp. pp. 801-833; Elms, 1969; McGuire, 1969; Miller, 1973; Miller & Burgoon, 1973). For the most part, interest has centered on the extent to which the persuadee's participation in counterattitudinal advocacy produces modification of his original attitudes toward the belief-discrepant message issue and on the variables facilitating or inhibiting such attitudinal modification.

An early study dealt with the persuasive efficacy, defined in terms of immediate attitude change, of participation in counterattitudinal advocacy as opposed to passive reception of a belief-discrepant persuasive message. Janis and King (1954) had one group of subjects deliver counter-attitudinal speeches as sincerely as possible, while a second group listened passively to the speeches. Immediately after speaking or listening, all subjects completed an attitude change measure. Results indicated that subjects who engaged in counterattitudinal advocacy were significantly more

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favorable toward the message position than were subjects who passively listened to the speeches. Later studies (Culbertson, 1957; Watts, 1957) have replicated this finding.

In a second study, King and Janis (1956) sought to determine why counterattitudinal advocacy resulted in considerable attitude change. Two conceiveable explanations were tested: first, improvisation of belief-discrepant arguments may have produced conditions conducive to attitude change; second, counterattitudinal advocates may have changed because of satisfaction associated with their public performances. King and Janis conclude the first explanation is more tenable; moreover, they suggest the crucial dimension of improvisation is invention of arguments.

There is a second dimension of persuasive efficacy not tapped by the Janis and King study; namely, the extent to which attitude change resulting from counterattitudinal advocacy persists in the face of later conflicting messages, or counterpropaganda. In terms of attempting to assess the relative persuasive impact of counterattitudinal advocacy and the more customarily used persuasive technique of passive exposure to a message, the key question can be stated as follows: given comparable amounts of attitude change, does counterattitudinal advocacy confer greater resistance to subsequent counter-propaganda--i.e., messages supporting the originally held position--than does passive exposure to a persuasive message?

The work of McGuire and his associates (see; e.g., McGuire, 1964) in the area of belief immunization provides some clues relating to the preceding question. In their research, McGuire and his associates have studied the relative persistence of resistance to persuasion conferred by

active and passive defense sessions. Subjects assigned to active defense sessions are asked either to prepare arguments supporting a commonly held belief, or cultural truism (active-supportive defense), or to consider arguments opposing the truism and to prepare refutations of these arguments (active-refutational defense). By contrast, subjects assigned to passive defense sessions either read arguments supporting the cultural truism (passive-supportive defense) or read refutations of arguments opposing the truism (passive-refutational defense).[1] After participating in one of the defense sessions, all subjects are exposed to counterpropaganda attacking the cultural truism, and following exposure to the attack, their attitudes concerning the cultural truism are measured. Persistence of resistance is assessed by varying the time that elapses between the defense session and the attack message.

For purposes of the question of central concern to this paper, participating in an active defense session can be considered somewhat analogous to engaging in counterattitudinal advocacy, while participating in a passive defense session is somewhat similar to passively partaking of a persuasive message. Even so, the two situations differ in at least two crucial ways, suggesting that considerable caution is necessary in generalizing McGuire's findings to the counterattitudinal advocacy arena. First, the task posed for McGuire's subjects is not counterattitudinal; rather, the aim of all four types of defense sessions is reinforcement of presently held beliefs. Second, the subject matter of almost all the topics used in

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[1] Actually, McGuire uses more than four types of defense sessions; e.g., the refutational sessions are further divided into refutational-same counterarguments and refutational-different counterarguments. Further distinctions do not seem necessary, however, for the argument developed here.

immunization studies is purposely noncontroversial. In order to test rigorously the inoculation theory underlying much of the research, McGuire and his associates have used cultural truisms that are accepted by almost all members of the society; e.g., "People should brush their teeth after each meal," or "Everyone should have a periodic physical examination." While one could create a counterattitudinal task by asking persons to present arguments opposing these truisms, the subject matter would depart radically from the typical issues which serve as grist for the persuasion process. McGuire acknowledges that controversial issues may yield different findings, asserting that "the same inoculation theory which yielded these largely confirmed predictions regarding immunizing cultural truisms against persuasion might yield different hypotheses regarding the effects of the same defensive variables on making controverted beliefs resistant to persuasion." (1964, p. 227)

Given these two reservations, McGuire's results indicate that time may be an important determinant of the relative superiority of counter-attitudinal advocacy or passive message exposure in conferring resistance to counterpropaganda. Specifically, he reports that passive defense sessions result in greater immediate immunization, a finding which suggests that if counterpropaganda follows on the heels of the original persuasive message, attitude change resulting from passive exposure will be more resistant to modification. Conversely, McGuire finds that immunization conferred by active defense sessions is more persistent. Thus, when counterpropaganda occurs at a later point in time, attitude change resulting

from counterattitudinal advocacy may well be more resistant to modification.

While these distinctions derived from McGuire's immunization research provide a useful starting point for investigating the relative resistance to counterpropaganda of attitude change resulting from counter-attitudinal advocacy and from passive exposure to a persuasive message, at least one alternative position merits brief discussion. Succinctly stated, this position holds that attitude change generated by counterattitudinal advocacy should generally be more resistant to counterpropaganda than change generated by passive message exposure: first, because counterattitudinal advocacy demands greater involvement with the initially belief-discrepant issue, and second, because counterattitudinal advocacy requires a greater degree of public commitment to the position espoused in the initially belief-discrepant message.

Most explanations of the persuasive effects of counterattitudinal advocacy lean heavily on some dimension of persuadee involvement. As indicated above, Janis and King attributed the persuasive superiority of counterattitudinal advocacy over passive message reception to invention of arguments, definitely an involving cognitive process. Later work by Janis and his associates (e.g., Janis & Gilmore, 1965; Elms & Janis, 1965) has relied upon an expanded version of this explanation, a version labeled incentive theory. Janis and Gilmore put it this way:

> When a person accepts the task of improvising arguments in favor of a point of view at variance with his own personal convictions, he becomes temporarily motivated to think up all the good positive arguments he can, and at the same time, suppresses thoughts about the negative arguments which are supposedly irrelevant to the assigned task. This "biased scanning" increases the salience of the positive arguments and therefore increases the chances of acceptance of the new attitude position. (1965, 17)

Obviously, such a complex scanning process demands a level of involvement not necessitated by the role of passive message recipient.

Similarly, the dissonance interpretation of counterattitudinal advocacy effects posits that high levels of effort facilitate attitude change (Zimbardo, 1965; Perry, 1971). Certainly, considerable energy expenditure augers substantial involvement, particularly when the task demands are largely cognitive. Moreover, it seems reasonable to argue that attitude change which results from the persuadee's participation in a highly motivating, involving activity should be more resistant to subsequent counterpropaganda than change which occurs after the persuadee has passively monitored a persuasive message.

Not only does counterattitudinal advocacy engender greater persuadee involvement, it also requires the persuadee to make a public commitment to the initially belief-discrepant position. Counterattitudinal advocacy assignments almost invariably necessitate preparation of arguments for some real or ostensible target audience. Since the persuadees are led to believe that the audience will be reading or hearing their messages, compliance with the counterattitudinal encoding request constitutes a form of public commitment. While the "freezing" effects of such a commitment may be somewhat dampened when the persuadee is allowed to remain anonymous, studies dealing with the effects of commitment (McGuire, 1969; Kiesler, 1971) suggest that resistance to subsequent counterpropaganda should still be heightened. Furthermore, many acts of counterattitudinal advocacy do not permit the persuadee to retain a cloak of anonymity.

Note that the preceding arguments concerning involvement and public

commitment coincide with the inference, drawn from McGuire's immunization research, that counterattitudinal advocacy should be superior to passive message reception in terms of conferring long-term resistance to counter-propaganda. What the arguments do cast doubt on is the inference that passive message reception will have the edge in conferring immediate resistance. Instead, this alternate position holds that attitude change resulting from counterattitudinal advocacy will be more resistant to modification by counterpropaganda, both immediately and over the long haul.

As a beginning step in investigating the extent to which counter-attitudinal advocacy confers resistance to subsequent counterpropaganda, Tate (1970) conducted a study to test the following hypotheses:

(1) Persons who engage in counterattitudinal advocacy will report more attitude change in the direction of the position advocated than persons who are passive recipients of a persuasive message.

This hypothesis constitutes an attempted replication of the earlier finding of Janis and King, Culbertson, and Watts.

(2) Among persons reporting comparable amounts of initial attitude change, individuals who engage in counterattitudinal advocacy will demonstrate greater resistance to change following immediate exposure to counterpropaganda than will individuals who are passive recipients of a persuasive message.

This hypothesis permits a test of the conflicting predictions about the immediate resistance conferred by counterattitudinal advocacy and passive message reception. The first, derived from McGuire's immunization research, holds that passive message reception should confer greater immediate resistance. The second, opted for in Hypothesis 2, argues that the greater involvement and public commitment necessitated by counterattitudinal

advocacy should culminate in more immediate resistance to counter-propaganda.[2]

Method

Subjects were 226 undergraduate students enrolled in summer school classes in sociology, political science, and education at a small Michigan college. As a result of a pretest administered during the first week of class, the topic, "mandatory on-campus living for all undergraduate students" was chosen as the counterattitudinal issue. Subjects were randomly assigned to experimental and control conditions.

Three weeks after the pretest, all subjects were asked to write (Counterattitudinal Advocacy condition) or read (Passive Reception condition) persuasive messages which would ostensibly be used to convince college freshmen to live on-campus.

Subjects in the Counterattitudinal Advocacy condition wrote messages advocating mandatory on-campus living for undergraduate students. These subjects were given a choice as to whether to participate in the study (Linder, Cooper & Jones, 1967; Hoyt, Henley & Collins, 1972), so as to increase their perceived involvement in the task. Moreover, they were asked to place their names on their essays in order to heighten public commitment (Collins, 1969).

The counterattitudinal messages were prepared according to a technique developed by Burgoon and Miller (1971). Subjects were given a series of

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[2] We would have preferred, of course, to have also varied the time between the initial persuasive attempt and the introduction of counterpropaganda in order to provide a more complete test of the distinctions discussed above. Unfortunately, there were not enough subjects available to permit this extension.

11 sentences from which one word was omitted. For each omission, the subject chose one of two highly intense phrases to fill the blank--e.g., "I (1) strongly like (2) like very much on-campus living because it makes a person a more well-rounded individual." After completing the sentences, each subject ordered them in the manner he considered most persuasive, rewrote the entire message in longhand, placed his name at the top of the essay, and turned it in to the experimenter. Use of this technique produced greater comparability of counterattitudinal task demands and allowed construction of a comparable message for use in the Passive Exposure condition.

After all essays were completed, subjects responded to a post-encoding questionnaire containing the same attitude scales used in the pretest. At the end of this questionnaire they found the counterpropaganda preceded by the statement: "Now we thought you might like to read one of the messages that are being used to persuade high school students that mandatory on-campus living is not the best housing plan for college undergraduates." The counterpropaganda message used adverbs of the same intensity as those employed in the counterattitudinal messages.

Subjects in the Passive Reception condition were given a booklet containing the persuasive message, and were asked to read it and to underline the arguments which seemed most persuasive to them. The message was constructed from the same 11 sentences used in the Counterattitudinal Advocacy condition, with the intense phrase used in each blank determined by chance. After finishing the message, subjects completed the post-reading

questionnaire and read the counterpropaganda.

Control subjects completed the questionnaire for assessing post-encoding (reading) attitudes without any preceding manipulation. They did not read the counterpropaganda.

After all subjects had engaged in the appropriate activities, the experimenter thanked them for their help and then indicated that in order to use subjects at the college, he had agreed to distribute an opinion survey for one of the departments. The post-counterpropaganda questionnaire was then distributed. Included among numerous controversial items were the scales used to measure pretest and post-encoding (reading) attitudes toward mandatory on-campus living. This two experiment guise (Rosenberg, 1965) was intended to reduce sensitization effects accruing from repeated attitude measures.

Results

Comparison of the pretest through post-encoding (reading) attitude change scores of each of the experimental groups with the pretest through posttest score of the control group by means of Scheffe's test revealed that both experimental groups changed significantly more than the control. Thus, both counterattitudinal advocacy and passive message reception produced a significant persuasive impact.

Table 1 contains the mean attitude scores for all subjects in both experimental conditions at all three times of measurement. As would be expected from examination of the means, a Type I analysis of variance

(Table 1) failed to provide support for Hypothesis 1. Neither the Type by Time interaction nor the between-subjects effect for Message Type was significant, with the lack of significance on this latter effect reflecting a failure to replicate the earlier finding of Janis and King, Culbertson, and Watts. The locus of the significant within-subjects effect for Time of Measurement is readily apparent from examining the tabled means.

Table 1. Mean attitude scores and analysis of variance for all subjects.

Condition	Pretest	Post-encoding	Post-count.
Passive Reception	7.25	15.00	9.48
Counterattitudinal Advocacy	8.17	14.50	9.50

Source of Variance	SS	DF	MS	F	P
Between Subjects	5997.28	116			
Type of Message	2.01	1	2.01	.038	
Error (b)	5995.27	115	52.13		
Within Subjects	7491.33	234			
Time of Meas.	3280.45	2	1640.22	90.17	$<.05$
Type by Time	26.50	2	13.25	.73	
Error (w)	4184.38	230	18.19		
Total	13488.61	350			

In order to test Hypothesis 2, subjects were divided according to the amount of attitude change they reported between the pretest and the post-encoding (reading) measures. Subjects who reported from 22 to 10 units of change were placed in the High Change group; subjects who reported from nine to four units of change were placed in the Moderate Change group; and subjects who reported less than four units of change were placed in the Low Change group.

Since the means for each of the paired groups are comparable at each time of measurement and do not differ significantly, Hypothesis 2 was tested by comparing the mean attitude change for Counterattitudinal Advocacy and Passive Reception subjects occurring between the post-encoding (reading) and post-counterpropaganda measures, the appropriate comparison for determining if the two persuasive techniques differ in the amount of resistance conferred to immediate counterpropaganda. The means for each of the total groups, as well as for each of the three levels of change, are found in Table 2. It is readily apparent that the results not only provide no support for Hypothesis 2, they also fail to establish a resistance-conferring advantage for either of the two persuasive techniques. While subjects in each of the groups report a significant modification of their attitudes toward their original position following exposure to counterpropaganda, the difference in the magnitude of change within each level is minimal, with none of the comparisons between Counterattitudinal Advocacy and Passive Reception groups approaching significance. Thus, the findings of this study can be stated quite succinctly: both persuasive techniques produced about the same

persuasive impact, and the change produced by both proved to be about equally resistant to modification resulting from immediate counter-propaganda.

Table 2. P_1-P_2 mean change for total subjects and at each of the three levels of change.

Condition	Difference	t	P
Total group			
Passive Reception			
$P_1 - P_2$	-5.52	7.93	<.05
Counter . Advocacy			
$P_1 - P_2$	-5.00	5.37	<.05
High Change			
Passive Reception			
$P_1 - P_2$	-7.46	7.69	<.05
Counter . Advocacy			
$P_1 - P_2$	-7.28	5.74	<.05
Moderate Change			
Passive Reception			
$P_1 - P_2$	-5.85	9.48	<.05
Counter . Advocacy			
$P_1 - P_2$	-4.73	4.43	<.05

Continued

Table 2 ---continued

Condition	Difference	t	P
Low Change			
Passive Reception			
$P_1 - P_2$	-2.33	2.69	$<.05$
Counter . Advocacy			
$P_1 - P_2$	-3.29	3.68	$<.05$

P_1 = Post-encoding (reading) questionnaire
P_2 = Post-c unterpropaganda questionnaire

Discussion

Both the differences between counterattitudinal advocacy and passive message reception as persuasive techniques and the earlier research of McGuire dealing with belief immunization suggest some intriguing possibilities concerning the relative efficacy of the two techniques in conferring resistance to immediate and delayed counterpropaganda. Still, the results of the present study are disappointing, to say the least. Not only were there no differences in the amount of resistance to immediate counterpropaganda conferred by counterattitudinal advocacy and passive message reception, but in addition, the thricely obtained finding of greater immediate attitude change for those engaging in counterattitudinal advocacy was not replicated.

Although admittedly speculative, there are several possible explanations for the negative results observed in the present study. First, the subjects

were predominantly middle-aged education students enrolled in a summer session at a small Michigan college, a sample that caused the researchers some trepidation from the outset. Apparently, many of these subjects did not take the experimental task too seriously. Failure to induce a sense of importance is attested to by the subjects' responses to a manipulation check question, "Did you feel that your contribution to the persuasive campaign was important?" Subjects in both conditions rated the importance of their participation below the midpoint of the seven-interval scale, with Counterattitudinal Advocacy subjects rating it lower than Passive Reception subjects. To the extent that task importance was minimized, the high involvement needed to optimize counterattitudinal advocacy effects may have been lacking.

It is also possible that the technique used to construct counter-attitudinal messages may have produced perceptions of low involvement and low commitment. Having received a partially completed message from the experimenter, subjects may have reasoned that the ideas in the message were not their own, but rather the experimenter's. An attempt was made to minimize this possibility by asking subjects to rewrite the message in their own handwriting and to sign their names to the essays. Moreover, in a prior study by Miller and Burgoon, subjects who constructed counterattitudinal messages in the same way indicated that they felt they were responsible for the ideas in the message. Still, given the different population of subjects sampled from in the present study, the technique may have been less than optimally effective.

The manner in which the counterpropaganda was introduced may also have

influenced the responses of subjects who engaged in counterattitudinal advocacy. Recall that these subjects had just finished writing belief-discrepant messages ostensibly intended to persuade high school students of the advantages of mandatory on-campus living. To the extent that recent dissonance theorizing emphasizing the dissonance-producing potential of aversive audience consequences is correct (e.g., Mel, Helmreich & Aronson, 1969; Bodaken & Miller, 1971; Collins & Hoyt, 1972), counter-attitudinal advocacy subjects may be experiencing considerable dissonance. Now, however, they are invited to read a message, ostensibly prepared for the same audience, arguing against the merits of on-campus living. Unfortunately, this message may provide a ready-made means of dissonance reduction, thereby enabling the subjects to revert toward their original position. Future studies should avoid introducing counterpropaganda in this way.

Finally, it may well be that the greater involvement and commitment associated with counterattitudinal advocacy have their greatest resistance-conferring advantage over time. Since the present study used only immediate counterpropaganda, this possibility remains a matter for future research. Presently, we are designing a study that manipulates not only the persuasive technique employed but also the amount of time elapsing between the initial persuasive attempt and exposure to counterpropaganda. Through this study, as well as others like it, it should be possible to answer some of the questions raised in the beginning pages of this paper.

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